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ABSTRACT

Use of the term "crisis" to define the midlife era suggests a limited sense of choice and control. The term "transition," however, emphasizes a process of change and suggests that the individual has both choice and power to grow and develop. An open-ended questionnaire was sent to professionals (N=42) in medical, psychological, sociological, and direct service areas. Data representing interdisciplinary fields of human and family development, developmental psychology, industrial psychology, adult education, family sociology, and vocational counseling were also collected from 21 respondents. The professionals reflected on chronological, physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions of the phenomenon of midlife. Several events marking midlife were indicated by respondents. For one variable, midlife career change, professionals rank ordered factors that would be influential on the career changer. Marriage was ranked as the most important system, followed by the immediate family, and the social networks of friends and coworkers. A synthesis of responses defined midlife as the age interval of early 30s to late 50s which represented a process of managing change in discrete situations. The findings suggest that growth, maintenance, or stagnation may result from the strategies used to manage one's lifestyle during midlife change. (NRB)

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CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE MIDLIFE ERA: IS IT STAGNATION, MAINTENANCE OR GROWTH?

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INTRODUCTION

Past ideologies of aging have largely dealt with the problem of becoming an adult. Once the adult course was attained, nothing was left to worry about, no expanding purpose was designated. The trick was to stay alive and whole without risking attachments, making binding choices, or "rocking the boat." The initial contrasting viewpoint was expressed by Jung (1933, 1960) as a clinician. He suggested that the fourth decade of adult life brings changes in personality and in behaviors and claimed that the older we grow, the more individuated we become. The impetus to formulate developmental frameworks across the life span and particularly in the middle years has come from classical and longitudinal studies of Gould (1972), Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee (1978), Lowenthal, Thurnher, Chiriboga, & Associates (1975), Neugarten (1968), Sears & Barbee (1977), and Vaillant & McArthur (1972). In this paper, the work of Baltes, Reese, & Lippsitt (1980), Erikson (1963), Levinson et. al. (1978), and Super and Hall (1978) provide the developmental orientations to the midlife era in areas of human development and career development. Theoretical aspects of "reciprocal determinism" (Bandura, 1977), and attributional theory of Kelley (1978) are incorporated into interpretations of the life span approach, for later testing of efficacious outcome resulting from change and coping with change.

Several investigators have ascribed a chronological notion to the middle years. The influential viewpoint of Erik Erikson (1959, 1963) suggested that

life stages or crises do not have a specific chronological age; rather, the stages are processes of self-appraisal and changes in thinking and behavior, much akin to the Jungian philosophy. Though initially Erikson had irreversible developmental sequences in life, he now has refined the stages to allow for movement back and forth among stages and for a continuing or recurrent conflict between stages throughout life (Erikson, 1963). In a consistent perspective, Fiske (1979) has defined the middle years as those of maturity which is the uninspirational average of what most middle aged people do, think, and feel. Most people, however, would prefer to believe that maturity is a time that potential has flowered and become reality. It is a "command" generation (Fiske, 1979; Neugarten, 1968) to set norms and instrumentally direct the course of society. It is a "caught" generation (Kerckhoff, 1976; Vincent, 1972) in that demands of the work world and expectations of the family, demands of youth, and anticipations of the elderly present dilemmas for the middle aged individual. In addition, societal changes in the highly technological era of the United States with unprecedented and rapid social changes force a confrontation with a series of identity crises in the latter half of life (Fiske, 1979; Stevens-Long, 1979). Hence the adult in our culture has to face the events of change in ways that lead to stagnation or regression; to a continuance of the same self-protective lifestyle; or to a synergistic assimilation of conflicts and aspirations which emerges in personal growth and self-actualized maturity.

In this paper, an attempt to synthetically and synergistically formulate a perspective of the midlife era which incorporates a bifurcation point in the developmental processes of life within the individual and impacting upon the family. The quality of life has the potential in midlife to improve with maturity though some choose the consequences of stagnation or regression and others struggle to maintain a <u>status quo</u> in their lifestyle in the midst of a changing

society. Experts who have published in the area of midlife have provided current perceptions of the midlife phenomena and their rank order of what variables are judged to most important. Perceptions of midlife are also provided by middle-aged persons concerned about midlife and by the traditional college student e.g., the twenty-year-old.

THE MIDLIFE ERA

"Midlife Crisis" on "Midlife Transition"

Frequent labels assigned to the human condition in the adult middle years are "midlife crisis" (Brim, 1976; Levinson et. al., 1978; Gould, 1972; Neugarten, 1968; Vaillant & McArthur, 1972) and "midlife transition" (Dohrenwend, 1977; Neugarten, 1979; Stevens-Long, 1979; Tiedeman, 1978). Crisis and transition have distinct affect connotations and such attributional labelling are posited to influence the perceived consequences and outcomes for life happenings and in problem-solving. Indeed, stagnation, maintenance, or growth could occur systematically for the different labels.

"Crisis". "Crisis" has the following definition: A change of a disease which indicates recovery or death; the point of time when an affair or process has reached its height and must soon terminate or suffer a tangible change; a turning point; a determining factor in a process. "Midlife crisis" is derived from the medical model of disease which has an identifiable event(s) as the critical point as in the definition. Out of this paradigm has been the writings of Levinson et. al., (1978); Sheehey (1976), and Vaillant (1978) to indoctrinate the public on the "crises" of midlife. Pervasive implications of these writings include psychological distress, deteriorating structures, fatalism in problem solving, ambivalence, strife, and an interruption in the tranquility and consistency of life (Fried, 1967; Riegel, 1975; Stevens-Long, 1979). With such an attributional viewpoint, the midlife individual merely accepts the discomforting

effects of the events and processes of aging in a pessimistic, deterministic attitudinal set. Stagnation of the developmental processes seem certain to occur in this paradigm.

In the framework of attributional theory, the self is protected from blame (Walster, 1967; Shaver, 1979) and events and environmental forces are seen as imposing unwanted consequences on the aging person. Not only is there a negatively skewed perception of the world, but also the skewed perception would limit the number of possible alternatives to solve problems in living. The constriction of opportunities presumably would lead to a sense of loss of control of one's life, an acceptance of fatalistic attitudes toward life's happenings, and a decreased quality of life. Perhaps the Chinese proverbial meaning of crisis needs to be inserted into the definition: Crisis is a happening which provides an opportunity for growth or for deterioration depending on what the individual chooses to do with the event.

The psychological "crisis" concepts support the notion that a person in crisis is paralyzed and traumatized, is incapable of making effective decisions, has old coping strategies thwarted in managing effective the stress, develops new coping behaviors that are adaptive or maladaptive to reduce the psychological discomfort associated with the unexpected event (Caplin, 1964; Hendall, 1970; Taplin, 1971). If the person's behaviors are maladaptive to the stress, an experiential state of despair, hopelessness, helplessness, and sense of low self esteem effects a state of depression in attitudes and in behaviors. In this psychological state, the impaired decision making capacities and paralyzed lifestyle of the depressed person might also impinge on the relationships of the immediate support systems. Hence, the depressive experiences of "crisis" of one family member may be caught by others in the system (Halpern et. al., 1979; Minuchin, 1974) and the quality of life would be decreased.

To illustrate the use of "crisis" in the empirical studies of middle aged people, the longitudinal work of Vaillant & McArthur, (1972) and Neugarten (1968) are found to contain negative and pessimistic descriptions of the midlife person. The midlifer is one who is pressured, disappointed, exploited, has chronic depressions, and expressed a dissatisfaction with marriage and work. Yet, within the same study of men (Vaillant & McArthur, 1972), the subjects reported a satisfaction with life and a sense of vibrant energy. In a group of middle-upper socioeconomic strata of middle aged men and women (Neugarten, 1968), subjects reported a sense of pride in being in the prime of life; an appreciation of being an expert, a policy-maker, and norm-formulator; of being wiser than the young and stronger than the old; and a feeling of using the past to learn from and to provide a constrast for the future in planning and problem-solving. Such quotes of conflicting subjective evaluations of the "midlife crisis" suggest that something good is going on in midlife. Perhaps, the "crisis" may be the rose-colored glasses of the reporting investigators who are biased by theoretical frameworks.

"Transition". Midlife transition is defined in more positive terms: A passage from one place or state or another; a turning point from one subject to another, a process of change. Developmental and educational aspects of midlife transitions are incorporated in the change associated with the middle years. In anecdotal literature with men as subjects, transition is described as taking pride in the prime of life, having a view of heightened capacity to manage and control situations with authority, autonomy, and expertness (Brim, 1976; Neugarten, 1968;, 1979; Vaillant & McArthur, 1972). Life events are accepted as ordinary happenings for the culture and from such a perspective, an individual scarcely would label an event as a "crisis-precipitating event" (Gurin, Beroff, & Feld, 1960; Neugarten & Datan, 1974; Stevens-Long, 1979). According to Neugarten

(1979), Dohrenwend (1977), and Baltes et. al. (1980), anticipated events are normal life experiences, have less stress accompanying the event; whereas, unanticipated and off-sequence life events have more stress concomitant with the coping strategies and less control is perceived. In this latter case, the events might be labelled as crisis and the former could be viewed as transition.

Strategies of coping with environmental stress have positive outcomes on the quality of life when several conditions are present (Dohrenwend, 1977): The person anticipated the event, had a sense of control in the situation by perceiving choices as alternatives, had anticipated expectations met, had a sense of hope and manageability about the event. Fiske (1979) emphasized inner and outer resources to cope with the reality of events. She enumerated these as anticipation of event; having the mood and insight to resolve problems in living; a capacity to respond to stress and strain; psychological resources of commitment, competence, creativity, and curiosity to master the world; a sense of developing autonomy across the age span; capacity for quality-type relationships including intimacy, friendship, and social networks; capacity for hope; ability to synthesize ambiguities; and maintenance in degree of equilibrium between conflict and aspirations.

It would appear that midlife transition has two important dimensions: The sense of control in the choosing of alternatives is perceived by the individual and the capacity to learn, grow, and develop in knowledge and skills which provides opportunity for the individual. Both dimensions could potentially contribute to a positive influence to the quality of life in the individual and in the family. My hypothesis is that enabling the individual and his or her family to use new skills will positively influence the efficacy of self (Bandura, 1977), family, and other support systems. Past crisis paradigms have depicted the midlife era in a restricted choice and limited sense of control to take

advantage of opportunity to acquire new skills throughout the life span. In this author's viewpoint, the use of midlife transition rather than midlife crisis involves more than a re-labeling of life experiences (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). What is assessed and how it is assessed as "healthy" (Bradburn, 1969) becomes extremely important and necessarily limits the interpretations of the findings. How mental health professionals view individuals and families as healthy or dysfunctional becomes a clinical issue (Brandburn, 1969; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Gurin et. al., 1960; Kelley, 1979; Watzlawick, et. al., 1974). How we view the midlife era, how practitioners define normality from current population norms, and how theoreticians provide perspective and suggest prediction encumber the professional with multidimensional implications in working with couples or families.

In summary, midlife transition emphasizes the changing nature of life across the life span. Midlife era is a "passage" (Levinson et. al., 1978; Sheehey, 1976) in a process of learning and enrichment (Dohrenwend, 1977; Baltes et. al., 1980) conducive to improvement in the quality of life. Middle age is a state of mind (Fiske, 1979). An individual comes to the conclusion that this is middle age for me. In mastery of this transition, some people attempt to minimize the change they make; others grow to a new level of functioning in the adjustment; and others withdraw from their social systems and wither inwardly to psychological dysfunction (Stevens-Long, 1979).

One of the purposes of this paper is to present a current viewpoint of experts publishing in the area of midlife human development.

Most of these viewpoints support the use of midlife transition. Data is presented in the next section.

METHODS

To assess the current philosophy of those publishing in the last five years about human midlife development, an open-ended questionnaire was sent to professionals (N=42) in medical, psychological, sociological and direct service areas. Data representing interdisciplinary fields of human and family development, developmental psychology, industrial psychology, adult education, family sociology, and vocational counseling was collected from 50% of the professionals to whom the questionnaire was sent. Questionnaires were returned from professionals working in diverse geographic areas, such as: New York, Maryland, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Louisiana, Utah, Arizona, and California. Mean age was 44.6 years with 14.8 years of teaching experience and 5.0 years of clinical work. Twice as many males as females (N=7) were represented and all had advanced graduate degrees. The responses were collected in January to March of 1980 and these data are viewed to be a consensual, though non-random, viewpoint of experts in the midlife span.

RESULTS

An ambiguous query of "What is midlife?" generated several dimensions to the phenomenon labeled "midlife:" chronological, physiological, psychological, and sociological. Perhaps the most succint definition was "a state of mind between a second after birth to a second before death which would presumably occurs in old age."

Other responses suggested the following notions about life events which occur between ages 30 to 70: Anticipating life events and managing the attendant stress; living one-half of life which remains; loosening of the sex (gender) roles; an orientation of leaving heirs in one's work or of remaining stagnant in the job or profession; a sense of more personal inner awareness and developing a boundry of self from the world to achieve more personal goals; a growing and

maturing to adapt to stresses and tensions of living; and a hedonic orientation to "please oneself." These replies suggest the reaction of the individual to the age interval of midlife.

The impact of social conditions on midlife was suggested to be the following: Life events as job and/or family history define midlife as a psychosocial phenomenon; having cultural experiences unique to this generation; responding to shifts in roles within a dynamic life cycle; increasing the number of role transitions; and the sense of achieving all the growth one can or all the benefits one is entitled to accomplish in this society.

The professionals implicated the biological aging process as affecting the psychosocial sphere by these suggestions: The beginning of disease processes are being diagnosed e.g., high blood pressure, ulcers, cardiovascular difficulties, cancer; the loss of youthful vigor in athletic prowness, sexual interest or capacities, and decreased involvement in hectic schedules to conserve personal resources of energy; the addition of body weight coupled with a loss of vigor becomes influential in selecting activities which are pursued with high degrees of motivation and commitment.

Finally, the most simplistic notion of midlife was the median response of the age interval of 35 to 65 as the chronological aspect of midlife.

The experts also posited that several myths about midlife pervade the thinking of society. Such misconceptions, in their evaluations, bias and restrict the perceptions of midlife:

1. Over-reliance on chronological age thwarts investigations of the midlife phenomena;
2. Midlife is a stagnant period of life and contains crises as life events;
3. Midlife transitions are severe and destructive;
4. Midlife crisis is the physiological event of menopause in female

and male;

5. One-half of life is over and no more can be expected than what you now have;
6. The "empty nest syndrome" or launching children from the home is associated with depression particularly for the mother but also affects the father;
7. The same job is held for all one's working life;
8. "It can't happen to me."
9. "It happens to everybody."

The events marking midlife indicated by the experts also agreed with situations in society and included the following: The launching of children from the family home; gaining in-laws; being grandparents for a first time; having a separating relationship with spouse or children or extended family or friend(s) or job; experiencing a climacteric in sexual function most notable by menopause in women and the loss of sexual erection capacity in men; perceiving a shift in roles within the family or job with self-assessed needs being a motivation for those adjustments; revamping the marital relationship to accommodate task performance changes, increased leisure time which permits marital partners to spend time together---or apart, the realignment of marital decision-making roles as the wife gains economic and psychological independence derived from paid employment and a career; and/or the new social support systems formed from a career change at midlife.

This author opted to deal with only one of these events in midlife--the midlife career change. Implications of personality organization, adult psychological maturation, the efficacious problem solving strategies to deal with change. The advantage is that this event may have less affective significance and less sensitive in nature than attempting to assess the differential sexual

functioning or interpersonal relationships following a divorce. Consequently, the individual may have fewer reservations to provide socially desirable responses to questions concerning midlife career change compared to other areas of life.

According to experts, a midlife career changer is a person who, most simply, changes careers between ages 35 to 60; "who embarks on a new career because the old career is finished;" "who grows within the career but may not be changing occupation;" "who is significantly altering an immediate support system as marriage, family, community or social relationship by separating or becoming individuated out of the system;" and "who changes from a successful career track of about ten years duration and moving into another occupation quite different from the first."

Various factors that would be influential on the midlife career changer were rank ordered from a list provided the professionals: 1) attitudes about self; 2) personal values and beliefs; 3) stress in family or work systems; 4) attitudes about work; 5) marital adjustment to role changes; 6) mental and physical state of health; 7) strategies used to solve family conflict; 8) stress in the career changer; 9) job satisfaction; 10) personality dimensions and situational constraints (tie); 11) strategies used to facilitate the career change; 12) the responses of significant others to the career change; 13) demographic factors of age, sex, education, SES; 14) strategies and behaviors used in the actual job change; 15) last 3 jobs held; 16) job history in last five years; 18) other---change in the relationships with the extended family. As ranked by the professionals, the most important system of the midlife changer of careers is the marriage and followed by the immediate family. Of lesser importance but almost equal in impact are the social net works of friends and work colleagues.

DISCUSSION

Experts publishing in the area of midlife phenomena have provided a broad perspective which included affective components to define the vague, multi-dimensional midlife transition and the midlife career changer. As a synthesis of these responses and of literature suggestions, this author would suggest the following operational definition for the midlife phenomenon:

> Midlife in the human lifespan would encompass the age interval of early thirties to late fifties and represents a process of managing change in discrete situations. Tangible losses might include the launching of children from home or the loss of aging parents or a job or a divorce from spouse; tangible gains might be the obtaining of a college degree and employment outside the home for a first time or being grandparents or having more time with spouse since children have left home. A self-evaluation would have an awareness of self and needs, of one's own mortality, a sense of competency and mastery on one's abilities, a re-prioritizing of activities and readjustment of what activities one becomes greatly involved in. The needs of self integration e.g., ego integration become more prominent as one focuses upon the tasks of being mentor to vocational and avocational heirs. The interpersonal relations with spouse, family, and friends undergo some change to reflect a changing value orientation. Within the marriage, instrumental and expressive tasks are performed by both partners in more equal proportions and the gender roles become more diffuse to define. Increased activities to care for aging parents become apparent. Finally, the person in midlife is experiencing a zest and anxiety in

life as normal events of "losses and victories, mournings and celebrations" (Neugarten, 1979) which are coped with as stress is concomitant with the event. This inclusive process could be termed the midlife transition.

A Conceptualization of the Midlife Era

How we look at things in life necessarily focuses our attention on certain aspects; consequently, the perspective is limited, the interpretations are constricted (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1979; Shaver, 1978). The priority of influential factors may be misrepresented and important factors may be omitted which may result in only a small percent of the variance of a dependent variable being accounted for (Bowers, 1973; Balter et. al., 1980; Wachtel, 1980). Many studies in the family and psychological areas are illustrative of such non-substantive results and account for less than 10% of the variance in an outcome measure.

Baltes et. al. (1980) have presented a hypothetical profile of the influence on behavior across the life span. Figure 1 is altered so that the number of changed behaviors appear on one axis to parsimoniously represent the impact of change across the life span. Three profiles are suggested; the person, the situation, and the person-by-situation are suggested to be the primary causes for the change in behaviors. (Interestingly, these profiles are the influential paradigms as historically developed across this century in psychology and sociology.)

"Person" Profile". The "person" curve depicts the effects of biological and cultural socialization upon the person in shaping the behaviors according to Baltes et. al. (1980). Relatively high numbers of behaviors in childhood are formulated and skills are accumulated in childhood and adolescence. As the curve decreases to an asymptotic point in the midlife era, a critical point--one could construe that this is a crisis point--occurs and the number of changed behaviors begin to increase presumably to contribute negatively

to the quality of life. The psychodynamic theories of Freud and neo-Freudians as Karen Horney, Erik Erikson would fit this profile very well in the interpretation of changed behaviors across the life span. In early childhood, the child has the task of individuation by escaping the oral stage of nurturance to the anal stage of autonomy, to the genital stage characterized by the Oedipal or Electra complex, then to the latency stage of identification in order to attain a normal life adjustment in adolescence and adulthood. The least conflicted life stage and most tranquil, consist, and stable years are the midlife years for the adjusted, healthy person, according to Freudian thinkers. If changes occur in the person's life at midlife, a clinician might judge this to be a symptom of maladjustment, conflict, and inner turmoil--a crisis in living. For example, a midlife change in careers is assumed to be characterized by problems of generativity, fear of failure, and life style doubts (Levinson et. al., 1978; Vaillant & McArthur, 1972; Vaitenas & Wiener, 1977). Therapy would be prescribed to help alleviate the distress.

As the curve shifts upward in later life, more maladjusted behaviors are predicted e.g., regression, denial, projection, and other defensive mechanisms used by the elderly person undergoing the processes of senility. In the Freudian viewpoint, the person is cause of charge in lifestyle and changed behaviors in later life are symptomatic of maladjustment.

"Situation" Profile. This curve is also multidirectional but is inversed from the person profile (See Figure 1). The events of history and the environmental pressures are viewed as the central cause for a changed lifestyle across the life span. In this curve, the most numerous changes occur in the work place as an adolescent or as an young adult. The asymptotic high point in the young to middle years could correspond to the high degree of vocational mobility associated with the career development. Early and late in the life

span, the economic conditions do not impinge change upon the lifestyle and work environment as drastically. In this curve, the most acquisition of skills could be interpreted to occur in the years of high school through university training. A loss in the ability to change behaviors are posited to occur in later life.

The cohort experiences of middle aged people at this point in time could include the Great Depression, World War II, liberalization of human rights, an affluent society providing choice and vocational developmental opportunity not available in past decades, concomitant inflation and recession as economic conditions. From a theoretical orientation (Skinner, 1953; Wolpe, 1958; Bandura, 1963), the contingencies of the environment have the greatest influence on what the person does in their work or activities. For example, pressures and decreased choices of the economic recession limit job opportunities currently; women experience sex discrimatory practices in hiring and advancement; financial necessity is impetus for dual-career families or one person holding two jobs (Balter, et. al., 1980); boredom and lack of enrichment programs for couples to develop their relationship contribute stagnation of marital union which leads to divorce (Kerckhoff, 1976). From an attributional viewpoint, the person chooses the alternative judged most beneficial, assigns the cause of the problem to situational forces, preserves self from blame, and fails to accept personal responsibility (Walster, 1967). The behavioral changes are viewed caused by the pressures and available choices presented by the situation.

"Person-by-situation" Profile. The "person-by-situation" or interaction curve is idealized as unidirectional and positive in an overall trend (Baltes et. al., 1980). The authors suggest that greater heterogeneity in the variance will be represented as individual differences to normal life events included in the curve. Negative effects are presumably masked by the positive

slope and the interpretation of this curve is that an ever increasing number of behaviors are changing across the age span. The theoretical framework of learning theories or self-actualization would explain such positive benefits throughout life. As one grows older, the acquisition of new information is integrated into effective coping strategies and enhanced working abilities are accompanied by maturation and competency. In the perspective of Fiske (1979), the past learnings are synergistically combined to formulate new resources to manage the changes in job tasks, family structure, role transactions, and marital adjustment

From an attributional framework, the person can look at self or the situation or both as cause of the changing lifestyle behaviors. Though situation has been assigned as influence and hence some self-protective attribution is achieved, self is assigned partial responsibility for the happening (Kelley, 1979).

In this author's opinion, the interactional curve provides a paradigm to accommodate the concept of learning, process, transitional states over the life span, and normal life events as sources of stress but the emergent behaviors would be labeled as competency and self-mastery in coping. A final critique is: The influence of learning to advance the human condition and improve the quality of life in the framework of person-by-situation interaction is seen as more realistic, is heuristic to advance knowledge, is parsimonious yet extensive and significant to encompass the relevant domains of the person and her or his social support systems, particularly the family.

The stages of Erik Erikson (1963), Levinson and associates (1978), and Super and Hall (1974) have a common theme of development across the life span in a person-by-situation orientation. Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical adult career stages which is a composite model. A bifurcation point in the

curve occurs in the midlife era and a growth, maintenance or stagnation could result from the strategies used to manage the lifestyle in the midst of change. The paucity of adult career development activities in work organizations (Murphy & Burck, 1976; Neapolitan, 1980; Super & Hall, 1977) demand attention to validate this career model. This author suggests that this concept of bifurcation in midlife era may be important in the empirical investigations of adjustment in the marriage and family as well as in the workplace.

Career development, marital adjustment, and family role transitions are considered important variables for the individual in midlife particularly as the job would change with technological advancement (Bradbury, 1975). Work and its meaning provide not only money, resources, and opportunity to enrich living, but also provide an identity of self (Fiske, 1979; Warnath, 1975) particularly in the middle years. Marital and life satisfaction are viewed critical to midlife transitions and the changes in other life spheres (Fiske, 1979; Kerckhoff, 1976) including work. Within such a mood of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Fiske, 1979), the function and quality of life within the family would intuitively deem to depend upon financial resources and marital adjustment.

At the individual level, the management of role transitions within a family system and the capacity to have quality close, intimate relationships with spouse and family members are predicted to be symptomatic of the adaptive coping strageties used to manage stress in other life spheres. The emotional and physical closeness of such relationships would become a stringent test for coping abilities and for reality testing of newly acquired behaviors to cope with changing situations. In essence, the molecular sphere of the marital-family system is the test arena for the molar changes to occur in the world.

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Figure 1. Idealized curves to illustrate how paradigms differ in predicting the change in behaviors across the life span. The person curve might be representative of psychodynamic theory; the situation curve radical behaviorism theories; the interaction curve social learning or self-actualization theories.